TWO

VI.

SERMONS,

ON

PREDESTINATION AND PROVIDENCE.

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OF THE ASSOCIATE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN OBION COUNTY, TENNESSEE.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF SOME CHRISTIAN FRIENDS
WHO HEARD THEM.

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SERMON,

ON PREDESTINATION AND PROVIDENCE.

'For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.'—Acts iv: 27, 28.

In the context preceding the words that I have now read in your hearing, we are informed that, by healing a lame man at the temple, Peter and John had attracted the attention of the multitude; and that, while they were addressing them, and calling them to repentance for killing the Prince of Life, 'the priests and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead, came upon them.' We are also informed that, on the following day, the Jewish rulers convened, and, having arraigned the two apostles, 'demanded of them by what power, or by what name' they had performed the cure. In answer to this demand, the two brethren told them that 'it was by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom they had crucified, and whom God had raised from the dead, that this man stood before them whole.' They also boldly asserted that 'there was none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.' When the Sanhedrim perceived their boldness, they marvelled; but, 'seeing the man who had been healed standing among them, they could say nothing against it. But, commanding the two apostles to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, and determined to charge them to speak no more to any man in the name of Jesus, and, then, to let them go. Having recalled them into the council, they, accordingly charged them. 'But Peter and John answered and said unto them, whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.' Having still further threatened them, the council let them go. Being dismissed, 'they went to their own

company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had done unto them. And, when they heard that, they lifted up their voice with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, who hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is; who, by the mouth of thy servant David, hast said, why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Christ. For, of a truth, against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.'

In his commentary, Dr. Clarke says, that there is a parenthesis in this text. The part of it which he includes in his parenthesis is this: 'Both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together.' But, with all due deference to the opinion of so great a scholar, I must say that this is palpable nonsense. In reading a sentence, containing a parenthesis, we may omit the parenthesis, without injuring the sentence. But if, in reading the text before us, we leave out the Doctor's parenthesis, we thereby absolutely destroy the sentence. It will read as follows: 'For, of a truth, against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.' Now every man who knows what a sentence is, can easily see that this is no sentence at all.

In the text there are three words that I shall now briefly explain. They are 'whatsoever,' 'counsel,' and 'determined before.'

'Whatsoever' is a compound relative pronoun, including both the antecedent and the relative; and is, in meaning, equivalent to 'the things which.' The antecedent part of it is the object of the action expressed by the verb 'to do;' and the relative part of it is the object of the action expressed by the verb 'determined before.' Consequently, the things which Herod and Pilate and their associates were gathered together to do, are the very same things which the counsel of God had determined before to be done.

The Greek noun which is here translated 'counsel' is derived from a verb that signifies, to will, or determine, or decree. As defined by Groves and others, it means, will, determination, design, purpose, decree, counsel. The counsel of God, therefore, is the same thing as his decree or purpose.

The Greek verb that is here translated by our compound verb 'determined before,' is compounded of the preposition '*pro*,' which means before, and the verb '*orizo*.' This verb is derived from '*oros*,' a boundary, limit, or termination. Hence the compound word means to determine before, or, what is the same thing, to predetermine, predestinate, or foreordain. In the 8th chapter

Romans it is rendered 'predestinate:' 'whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.' And in the 2d chapter of 1 Corinthians, it is translated 'ordained before:' 'We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory.' What I desire you here to notice particularly, is, that the expression 'determined before,' is identical in meaning with the words predestinate and foreordain. This I have already proved by referring to the original. But, lest some of you should question the truth of my statements, I will now prove the same thing without even alluding to the Greek.

Well, none of you are so ignorant as not to know that the inseparable preposition '*pre*' means 'before;' and consequently, that 'to determine before,' is the same thing as 'to predetermine.' Taking this for granted, then, I would simply refer you to Walker's definition of the verb 'to foreordain.' He says it is 'to predestinate, to predetermine, to preordain.' Consequently, according to that eminent legicographer, these three words all have one and the same signification.

I. Having explained these words in the text, I shall now, in the first place, direct your attention to the following inquiry:— What things were these men who are mentioned in the text, gathered together to do against the holy child Jesus? In the history of the matter, as given by the evangelists, the answer to this question is easily found. Herod, with his men of war, set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate. Pilate gave sentence of death against him, scourged him, and permitted his soldiers to mock and buffet him; to spit upon him, and to crown him with thorns. He delivered him up to be crucified, and authorized his officers to attend to the execution of his unrighteous and cruel sentence. The people of Israel took him by fraud and deceit; they sought false witness against him to put him to death; and, when agonizing upon the cross, they reviled him, wagged their heads at him, and exulted in his tortures. Such is a very brief summary of what they were all gathered together to do against the holy child Jesus. Now all these things were sins; and, not only so, but, highly aggravated sins. They were committed in opposition to light as clear as that of the noon-day sun. All of those persons had enjoyed opportunities of knowing that he was innocent, and that he was the promised Messiah.

II. In the second place, I would call your attention to the principal proposition contained in the text before us. It is this:— These most sinful actions of these most wicked men were predetermined, predestinated, or foreordained of God. In other words, the counsel of God predetermined them to be done. This is so plainly asserted in the text, that, to bring arguments to prove it,

would be a work of supererogation. To explain and illustrate the proposition is all that is necessary.

In what sense, then, are we to understand the apostles' declaration that 'the hand and the counsel of God predetermined' these wicked and cruel deeds to be done? They must either mean that God predetermined to *cause* them to be done, or that he predetermined to *permit* them to be done. Between these, there is no middle way; and beside them, there is no third way. The question to be answered, then, is this:—Do the apostles mean that God predetermined to *cause* those bloody men to abuse and murder Christ, or that he predetermined to *permit* them?

In order to answer this question most definitely and satisfactorily, we will descend from the decree of God about these sins to the execution of his decree. All admit that God executes his decrees in the works of creation and providence. When, therefore, we ascertain what, in his providence, he actually did, in regard to these things, then we will know what he had predetermined to do.

What, then, did God do in this matter? Did he cause these things to be done, or did he only permit them to be done?

To this question we most emphatically answer that he did not cause, but only permitted those wicked men to do these things. On this question, I presume that all christians will agree with me. But, for form's sake, I will adduce an argument or two to confirm my opinion.

1. In the first place, then, it is obvious that God did not cause them to commit these sins, because, in that case, he would have been the author of their sins, and they would have been blameless. But we hear the inspired apostles charging them with sin in the matter, and calling them to repentance for that sin.

2. In the second place, the recorded history of God's providence about the murder of Christ, proves that he did not cause, but only permitted, that murder.

Supposing he had intended to bring it to pass by direct causation, what course would he have pursued? Would he not have withheld the light that was needful to convince his murderers that he was the true Messiah, and innocent of crime? Certainly we may most rationally presume that he would. But did he withhold that light? No: he set it so clearly before them that, without voluntarily closing their eyes against it, they could not be at any loss to know who he was. He had given them the Old Testament prophecies to inform them when the Messiah would appear, from what family he would spring, in what town he would be born, what works he would perform, and what character he would sustain. Well, Jesus of Nazareth came at the time specified, sprang from the family mentioned, was born in the town designated, performed the works foretold, and bore the character described.

But, again, to draw the attention of all to him as the true Messiah, God sent John the Baptist as his fore-runner. This holy man of God went forth and most openly and loudly proclaimed to all men that the Messiah's advent was at hand. And when he made his appearance in public, John pointed him out with his very finger, as 'the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.' And this is not all. At the baptism of Jesus, the Father, by a voice from heaven, declared, in the ears of a multitude, 'this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.'

But, again, God gave these murderers yet more light to shew them who Jesus was. This additional light consisted in the innumerable, the undeniable, and the stupendous miracles that he performed.

Seeing, then, that God set before these wicked men the greatest abundance of the most convincing evidence that Jesus was his own Son, and consequently worthy of equal honor with himself, and incapable of committing any thing worthy of death, it would be most manifestly absurd to say that he *caused* them to murder him. As we understand it, therefore, the apostles' meaning is that God predetermined to *permit* those wicked deeds to be done against the holy child Jesus.

III. In the third place, I affirm that the murder of Christ was absolutely certain. In proving this proposition, my friends, I assume that God foreknows all the actions of men. At the same time, I am aware that there are some public teachers, at the present day, who deny this proposition. Long ago, Dr. Clarke asserted that God could have foreknown all the actions of men, but that he did not choose to foreknow them. But his followers have advanced a step farther, and openly declared that God neither did, nor could, foreknow the voluntary actions of men. But, as for those who, in plain view of the fact, that he has, one hundred times over, foretold such actions ages before they were done, I deem them too far gone in theological insanity to be affected by any argument on this point. If he did not foreknow all sorts of actions of men, good and bad, how could he have foretold them?

Proceeding, then, upon the assumption that God foreknows all the actions of men, I shall briefly prove that the murder of Christ was an absolutely certain event.

1. This is proved, in the first place, by the fact of its being predetermined by the hand and the counsel of God. Had it been uncertain whether or not it would take place, it would be manifestly absurd to say it was predestinated by the omniscient God. Before God created man and placed him on probation, he well foresaw that he would fall, and thereby involve himself and his posterity in ruin. He also well foreknew that he himself would raise up a Redeemer in the Jewish nation; and that, unless restrained by his almighty power, the authorities of that nation

would persecute and murder htm. And he predetermined that he would not prevent them by his power, but would permit them to follow the promptings of their own evil hearts in this matter. How, then, could it be uncertain whether they would murder Christ or not?

2. But, in the second place, we know that this event was absolutely certain, because God had frequently foretold it. In direct reference to it, ages beforehand, by the mouth of his servant David, he had said, 'Why did the heathen rage and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ.' By the mouth of the same inspired servant, in the 22d Psalm, he had foretold our Lord's crucifixion with several of its circumstances. He had expressly mentioned the piercing of his hands and his feet, and the parting of his raiment among his murderers. By the mouth of his servant Isaiah, he had foretold that the Saviour would be led as a lamb to the slaughter. By Daniel he had predicted that the Messiah would be cut off, but not for himself. And last of all, by the mouth of his Son Jesus Christ himself, he positively foretold that the Jews and Romans combined would put him to death by crucifixion. This being the case, the veracity of God himself was pledged for the certainty of the event. It must either come to pass, or the word of God must be falsified. But it is impossible that God should either lie or be mistaken. Consequently, the murder of Christ was absolutely certain.

IV. In the fourth place, notwithstanding this murder was predetermined or predestinated by the hand and the counsel of God, and notwithstanding it was absolutely certain, yet, in committing it the murderers acted most freely and voluntarily. Many will have it that, if any event which is to be brought to pass by the agency of men, is predestinated and certain, then, of course, in bringing it to pass, they are deprived of their liberty and converted into mere machines. But common sense and the Bible both teach otherwise.

1. In the first place, if you will only admit the foreknowledge of God, I can easily prove to you, from common sense, that their opinion is erroneous. As God foreknows all events, all events are, to his mind, absolutely certain; and, therefore, every day of your lives, you are bringing about such events. But, by your own experience, you well know, that you act freely and voluntarily. To give you one plain example: on yesterday, God knew positively that you would come to church to-day, and, consequently, your coming was fixed and certain. And yet you know assuredly that you have come here to-day in the exercise of your own free will. Your wills have not been fettered nor handcuffed: you have not been converted into mere machines.

2. But, secondly, that those murderers were not deprived of their freedom of will in bringing about this predestinated and certain event, is manifest from the history of the matter in the Bible. From that history we learn that, instead of binding their wills 'fast in fate,' God set motives before them that ought to have impelled them to an opposite course of conduct toward our Lord, and that would have done so, if they had been good men. Did he not send John the Baptist to exhort them to repent and to believe on him who was to come after him? Did he not send Jesus himself, and his twelve apostles, and his seventy evangelists, to preach the gospel of the kingdom throughout the whole land? And did he not, by these his ambassadors, offer pardon, and peace, and eternal glory to all who would believe in the name of Jesus Christ? Certainly he did. He, therefore, set before the minds of these murderers the same motives which impelled the disciples of Jesus to follow him in the face of every danger. Consequently, it would be absurd to say that he deprived them of their liberty.

But this is not all. If you will examine the actions of these men, from first to last, you will discover nothing like 'man-machinery,' but, on the contrary, every appearance of the most deliberate voluntary agency. When Herod with his men of war set our Lord at nought, and mocked him and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, do they appear to be under the influence of any fatal necessity compelling them thus to act? The farthest from it possible. When Pilate was sitting in judgment upon him, does he appear to be deprived of the free exercise of his will? By no means. We distinctly see his will wavering under the influence of good and bad motives, contending for the mastery over it. And, in opposition to the noble and heavenly motives that should have impelled him to defend the Saviour at the peril of his life, we see him deliberately yielding to the base and corrupt desire of conciliating the Jews, at the expense of innocent blood. And, with the same deliberation and hearty good-will, Judas and the Jewish rulers and people, and the Roman soldiers, acted their part in this awful tragedy.

It is, therefore, most abundantly manifest that the predestination and certainty of the event did not deprive them of their freedom of will.

In conclusion, I would now remark that all other evil deeds of men were predetermined by the hand and the counsel of God as well as the murder of Christ. We are expressly told by the apostle that he 'worketh *all things* after the counsel of his will.' Consequently we and our old-school Presbyterian friends who say that 'God foreordained whatsoever comes to pass,' are very unjustly treated, when we are denounced for maintaing that doctrine, as if we thereby made God the author of sin and men irresponsible machines. In stating this doctrine, we use expressions precisely similar to those which are used in the text before us.

True it is we employ the term 'foreordain' instead of 'predetermine;' but there is no difference in the meaning of these words. And, if it would satisfy our opposers and slanderers, we would cheerfully lay down the former and take up the latter expression. Nay, more: we would adopt the precise form that has been used by our translators, and say, 'God determined before whatsoever comes to pass.' But when men's interest leads them to find fault, and they are determined to do so, no modification of our expressions would silence their carpings. This is obvious from the fact that they close their eyes and their ears against our own explanation of the proposition alluded to, though it is precisely the same that we and they both use when we are interpreting the text before us and other similar ones in the Bible. In explaining this text, we say the hand and the counsel of God predetermined, not to cause, but only, to permit the sins mentioned to be committed. And, in explaining our assertion that 'God foreordained whatsoever comes to pass,' we say expressly that so far as sinful events are concerned, we do not mean that he foreordained to cause them, but only, that he foreordained to permit them. This explanation has been given to our adversaries a thousand times over, and yet they clamor as loudly as ever against our doctrine.

Some even go so far as to say that our explanation is forced, and openly at war with our doctrinal standards. But I am bold to denounce this as a false imputation. Our explanation is incidentally exhibited on the very face of those formulas, and that too so clearly as to meet the eye of any intelligent and candid person who desires to know their meaning. In proof of this, I have only to refer you to one or two quotations from them. In our shorter catechism, in answer to the question, 'How doth God execute his decrees?' we say, 'God executes his decrees in the works of creation and providence.' From this it is manifest, that our standards of doctrine teach, that God decreed nothing more, nor less, nor otherwise, about any thing, than what he *actually does*, about the same thing, in his works of creation and providence. If, then, the language of those doctrinal standards, respecting the decrees of God, in regard to sinful actions, be vague or obscure, the obvious course to be taken, and the course that will be taken by any *honest* inquirer, is, to turn to what they say on God's providence respecting sinful actions. Taking this plain path, now, let us examine what they do say in reference to his providence about such actions. Well, happily, on this point, they speak very distinctly. In our larger catechism, in answer to the question, 'What is God's providence towards the angels?' we say, 'God, by his providence, *permitted* some of the angels *wilfully* and irrecoverably, to fall into sin and damnation.' Now, if we entertained the opinion so often slanderously ascribed to us, we would have said, that he *caused* them to fall into sin and that too *against their will*. Again, in the same catechism we most

clearly and explicitly maintain that, when God placed man on probation, he left him to the freedom of his own will, and that man had the law of God written in his heart, and power to fulfil it. Now every man of common sense knows that this doctrine is utterly inconsistent with the doctrine that God foreordained to cause him to sin. But yet again, in the 6th chapter of our confession of faith, speaking of the agency of God about the first sin of our first parents, we expressly say, 'This their sin God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel, *to permit*.' Now, here it is plainly taught that God's providence was concerned about their sin by way of permission, and that this permission was according to his wise and holy *counsel*. And by the word 'counsel' we mean the same thing as by decree, or foreordination. And, in vain, my friends, will you search our standards for any expression that even seems to represent God as, in his providence, *causing* any creature to sin.

From what has been said, it will be obvious to all but the grossly ignorant, that the above explanation of our doctrine is fairly authorized by our ecclesiastical standards.

So far, then, as our own, and the above named sister church, are concerned, it is a gross and foul slander to say that we maintain views on the divine decrees that represent God as the author of sin, and men as converted into mere machines. And, what is more, there is no excuse nor palliation for such slander. It must proceed either from ignorance or from envious malice. Now, let us take the milder case of the two, and suppose that it proceeds from ignorance of the word of God and of our doctrine. At the bar of God what will it avail the slanderer to say that *he understood* us to maintain that God foreordained to cause men to sin? though he had never taken the pains to search for, or to ask for, the true meaning of our doctrine on this point. After he had circulated the calumny far and wide, and thereby prejudiced the minds of the uninformed against our ministry, and materially impaired, or ruined, their usefulness, the plea of ignorance would avail him nothing at that holy tribunal. His duty is either to inquire candidly what we do hold on this subject, or, in regard to our views, to be silent. But what shall we say in the other case? If such slander be so criminal even when it proceeds from ignorance, how atrociously wicked is it when it flows from malice, and is well known by the slanderer to be a base misrepresentation of our sentiments! When we expressly tell men that we do not say that God foreordained to bring sins to pass or to cause men to sin, but only that he foreordained to permit men to sin; and they close their ears against our declaration, and still go on asserting that we represent God as decreeing to bring to pass all the sins that ever have been committed, they do thereby, knowingly and maliciously calumniate us. And the guilt of such calumniation will be no light burden to bear at the judgment-seat of Christ.

SERMON,

ON PREDESTINATION AND PROVIDENCE.

'Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in the earth, and in the seas, and in all deep places.'—PSALMS CXXXV: 6.

By the scriptures we are informed that God is a spirit; and, according to the best information possessed by us, a spirit is essentially an active being. As it belongs to the very essence of matter to be inert, so it belongs to the essence of a spirit to be active. It would be no more unnatural for the clods of the valley to arise and fly away through unlimited space, than for a spirit to settle down into a state of torpitude. Accordingly the scriptures represent the Almighty and Omniscient Spirit as, in some manner, acting from eternity to eternity. Even before he called 'all worlds' into existence, he was acting. The persons in the Godhead were then, are now, and ever will be loving each other, and delighting and rejoicing in each other. Prior to his works of creation also, there was another class of actions performed by Jehovah. This class of actions constitutes what we call the decrees of God. As reason itself would anticipate, the scriptures clearly intimate, that, in eternity, he purposed to do, in time, all things that he has done or ever will do. They inform us that he 'worketh *all things* after the counsel of his will;' and that he foreordained this, and that, and the other event, before the foundation of the world. The third class of actions, done by 'the Lord,' are his works of creation, by which he peopled the boundless expanse with numberless worlds, and those worlds with innumerable orders of animate and inanimate beings. Then again, in order subsequent to the creation of the worlds and all things wherewith they are stored, there is another class of actions, done by the Almighty in reference to the creatures of his hand; and these we call the works of his providence. By the providence of God we mean the preservation of all his creatures, and the government of them and all their actions by his power and wisdom. It is this last-named class of actions that are spoken of in our text; and it is my purpose to make that text the foundation of a few remarks on the providence of God in regard to his creatures.

I. In the first place, then, I affirm that the great Creator preserves them all in existence. Were it not for the sustaining power

of his omnipotent arm, they would all cease to exist: they would all vanish into empty nothing whence they were called by his word, and leave infinite space as desolate as it was before the creation. That the creature is dependent on the Creator, is a self-evident proposition. It is no more able to *prolong* its own existence than it was to *originate* that existence. Independently of his perpetual energy, the laws of nature can do no more towards preserving and perpetuating the existence of his creatures, than our laws can do towards preserving peace and order without any one to administer them. They are nothing more than the established modes in which he chooses to exert his almighty power. Every one knows that a law is not the agent that operates, but only the *rule* by which the agent performs his operations.

But we are not left to the mere light of reason on this point. In the scriptures of truth, that preserving power, over all things, for which we contend, is repeatedly ascribed to the great Lord of all. In his address to the men of Athens, Paul says, 'In him we live and move and have our being.' In his epistle to the Hebrews, the same apostle speaks of the Son of God '*upholding* all things by the word of his power.' And, in his epistle to the Colossians, he declares that 'by him all things consist.' In the book of Nehemiah, we read 'Thou even thou art Lord alone; thou hast made the heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all things that are therein, the seas and all that is therein; and thou *preservest* them all.' And in full harmony with these various declarations, 'the sweet psalmist of Israel sings, 'Lord, thou *preservest* man and beast, how precious is thy grace.'

It is, therefore, a 'vain philosophy' that represents God as having delivered over his creatures to the care of certain laws of nature, and as having ceased to exert his own immediate power to preserve them in being.

II. In the second place, the Creator governs all his creatures, animate and inanimate, rational and irrational.

1. First, he governs the inanimate part of creation. It is he that causes the vapors to ascend, to collect into clouds, to condense into drops, and to descend to water and refresh the thirsty ground. It is he that causes the sun to shoot forth his genial rays to warm the earth and the waters. It he that causes each herb and plant and tree to spring and grow, and bud, and bloom, and fructify, and propagate its own particular species of vegetation. It is he that causes all the parts of the earth, and the atmosphere around it, to tend towards one common centre; and thus he fixes the lofty mountains on their deep and firm foundations, and sets limits to the mighty ocean itself, saying to it 'hitherto shalt thou come and no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.' And talk as you will about centripetal and centrifugal forces, it was his almighty hand that set all the planets in motion and that causes them to perform all their annual and diurnal revolutions. And

it is his power and wisdom that regulates all their movements so that not even a comet, in its erratic flight, is allowed to molest any of its kindred orbs.

2. In the second place, he governs the irrational part of the animal creation. Though not, like man, under the guidance of reason, the brutes themselves are perfectly under his control. Guided by that mysterious and wonderful instinct which is an emanation of his wisdom, they avoid dangers, safely select their food from among innumerable herbs and plants, many of which are poisonous, all propagate their own particular kinds, skilfully rear and protect their young, select the most suitable habitations, and, in many cases, lay up stores of provision for the winter. When he desires to employ them as the executioners of his wrath against wicked men, or to restrain them from injuring his servants, he has only to issue his command, and it will be implicitly obeyed. When his anger was kindled against Pharaoh for refusing to let his people go, at his bidding, frogs and flies and locusts and lice marched forth in battle array against the devoted monarch and his wretched subjects. When provoked to anger by the wicked children who mocked his prophet Elisha, he had only to signify his will, and the bears rushed forth from the forest, and rent them to pieces. And when displeased with the idolatry of the nations that had settled in the land of the exiled ten tribes of Israel, at his instigation the lions of the desert executed his vengeance upon them. But, on the other hand, when the innocent and pious Daniel was cast defenceless into the den of the same ravenous beasts of prey, by the controlling power of God they were made as gentle and innoxious as lambs.

Thus it is that the providential government of God regulates all the parts of the brute creation, and makes them subservient to his wise and holy purposes.

3. In the third place, in his providence, the Almighty Sovereign governs all men. He has prescribed the number of human beings that shall be born, and all the powers of earth combined cannot make that number either more or less. He also regulates the proportion between the number of males and that of females, in such a manner that the one does not very far exceed the other, and that the excess is generally on the side of the males who are most exposed to the dangers of the land, and the sea, and the sword. His providence also extends even to the features of each person's countenance. If all the individuals of the human race resembled each other in appearance as closely as the individuals in most races of the inferior animals do, it would give rise to numberless mistakes and frauds that would be most destructive to human happiness. But, in his adorable wisdom and goodness, God so diversifies the features of the human countenance, that, among a million of persons, you will not find two so exactly alike as to occasion very serious mistakes. Then, again, all the

events of the life of every person are governed and controlled by the providence of God. It is often said that 'man is the artificer of his own fortune,' but this opinion is erroneous. Whether we speak of the man who is pursuing wealth, or of him who is pursuing honor and distinction, the maxim is false. Often do we see the most industrious and worthy men laboring to accumulate wealth, but laboring in vain, while the weak and the worthless add 'field to field and house to house.' Then again, when riches are acquired by the most industrious and the most prudent, they often 'make to themselves wings and fly away as an eagle towards heaven;' and what mortal arm can arrest their flight? On this point the wise man tells us that, 'The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them both.' He it is that makes the one rich and the other poor. In reference to the pursuit of fortune along the path of honor, the above saying is equally untrue. Do we not often see the honest, the intelligent, and the patriotic man laboring in vain to ascend the ladder of political distinction, while the rotten-hearted, intriguing demagogue ascends with ease to its topmost rounds? Certainly we do. Consequently, as it regards the building of fortunes, it is as the psalmist of Israel says, 'Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it;' and, again, 'Promotion cometh not from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south; but God is the judge: he putteth one down and setteth up another.' But, again, many events that befal the children of men are attributed to chance. But, with God, there is no such thing as chance. No event can take place without being either caused or designedly permitted by his providence. When Ahab the king of Israel went to fight against the Syrians, he disguised himself in the garb of a common soldier, and a cer'ain Syrian drew a bow 'at a venture' and mortally wounded the wicked monarch. To the soldier it was all a mere venture, but the unseen hand of God directed the arrow to the breast of the devoted king. And, in like manner, does that unseen hand control even those events which, to men, appear most fortuitous. What can appear to be more completely under the direction of chance, than the casting of a lot? And yet Solomon says, 'the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord.' We say, therefore, that all events of every kind, in the life of every human being, are governed and controlled by the providence of the great Creator and sovereign Lord of the universe.

III. In the third place, I remark, that, in his providence, God not only preserves and governs all his creatures, but he also governs all the actions of those creatures. In this division of my subject, I shall confine myself exclusively to the actions of men. And, for the sake of distinction, I will divide these actions into two classes,—good and bad.

1. First, then, what does God do in regard to the good actions of men? He prompts, excites or causes them to do all such actions. To this assertion many will object, and say that, if it be true, he, by so doing, deprives them of their freedom of will, and, therefore, how good soever their actions may be, they are not virtuous, because they do not proceed from their own independent choice. But is it true, my friends, that God cannot excite or cause men to do good actions without depriving them of their freedom of will? No; it is not true. When one man pursuades another to do what is good and right, even by the power of the most enrapturing eloquence, does he thereby fetter that man's will? Every man of common sense says, no. Well, then, when God does the same thing by the same sort of means, neither does he fetter the will of man. But it may be said that we go farther than this, and say that God does not only employ means to persuade men to do good, but also influences them by the Holy Spirit, and that this is the point against which the objection lies. Well, I admit, we do hold that the Holy Spirit does influence men to yield to God's exhortations and persuasions. But where is the portion of scripture that says the all-wise God cannot do this too, without binding their wills? From the first of Genesis to the last of the Apocalypse, in vain will you search for any such a portion of scripture. But, perhaps, there is some piercing genius, in the world, who has discovered this proposition in the course of his profound metaphysical researches. If so, I would be glad to see the man. He must be far above the common order of men.

But it is time for me to show you that my proposition is in full accordanee with the declarations of the bible. For this purpose, I will first refer you to the words of David in the 65th Psalm: 'Blessed is the man whom thou dost choose, and *causest* to approach unto thee.' Here he expressly speaks of God's *causing* men to do a good action. I will now give you a quotation from the writings of Solomon. In the 21st chapter of Proverbs, he says, 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; as the rivers of water he turneth it whithersoever he will.' But though I might adduce a hundred passages that would bear on the point in hand, I will only add one more. In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul says, 'It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.' If these scripture proofs do not convince you that God causes or excites men to perform good works, you would not be convinced 'though one rose from the dead' and declared it to you.

2. In the second place, let us now inquire what God, in his providence, does in regard to the bad actions of men. Does he ever cause or excite them to do such actions? By no means. At the same time, if we were eager to find fault with the bible, or to shift the blame of our sins from ourselves to God, it would be easy for us to fabricate a very plausible argument out of the

language of scripture to prove that it represents God as causing men to commit sin. I will now give you a few specimens of the scriptural expressions that a corrupt mind would be most apt to press into its service for these unhallowed purposes. Respecting the great sin of Joseph's brethren in selling him into Egypt, he says to them, 'be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither, for *God did send me* before you to preserve life.' Again, in the history of God's dealings with Pharaoh in reference to the children of Israel, it is frequently said that 'he hardened Pharaoh's heart.' In the 24th chapter of 2d Samuel we read, 'The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he *moved* David against them to say, go, number Israel and Judah.' And from the context we learn that this numbering of the people by David was a sin. And in the 12th chapter of John's gospel, in reference to the Jews who believed not on Christ it is said 'Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath *blinded their eyes*, and *hardened their hearts;* that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.' And again, in the 9th chapter of Romans, Paul says, 'he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will *he hardened.*' These are a few of the many expressions in the bible that would be most easily perverted by the corrupt heart, so as to give support to the position that God causes or excites men to perform sinful actions. But cannot all such expressions be fairly interpreted so as to give no support to such a false and dangerous position? Yes, they can.

In the interpretation of scripture, one rule is, to explain ambiguous expressions by others, on the same subject, that are clear and not liable to be misunderstood. Well, according to this rule, we may satisfactorily explain all the passages above, and all of similar character, by one sentence in the epistle of James: 'Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, *neither tempteth he any man.*' This declaration is so very explicit that it forbids us to put, on the above expressions, such a construction as to make them teach that God causes men to do evil.

But, again, in order to ascertain the real meaning of scripture language, we must attend closely to the style of the sacred writers, and to the peculiarities of the Hebrew and Greek tongues.

Well, every one who carefully reads the bible, knows that those who wrote it very frequently used the most figurative language; and every person who studies the Hebrew and Greek, knows that those who spoke and wrote those languages expressed themselves very concisely, and very frequently and boldly used the figure of speech that is called ellipsis. By an ellipsis we mean the omission of some words, in a sentence, that will be easily understood and supplied by the reader or hearer. Our translation does not carry out the use of this figure to the same

extent as the originals do; for in many places the translators fill up the ellipses. But at the same time, even in that translation, we often meet with a very bold use of this figure. To give you one example that occurs to my mind, I would refer you to what Pharaoh's butler says to him, respecting Joseph's interpretation of his own, and the chief baker's dream. 'And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was: me he restored to mine office, and him he hanged.' Now no man of common sense is at any loss to know the meaning of this sentence. No one is so silly as to understand the butler to say that Joseph *literally* restored him to his office and hung his fellow-servant.

Well, there is no more difficulty in arriving at the true meaning of the sentences that I have quoted above, than there is in arriving at that of the one just quoted. When, for example, it is said that God 'sent' Joseph into Egypt as a slave, it is easy to see that all that is meant by the assertion is that he permitted his brothers to send him there in that condition. When Moses says that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and, in connection says also that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, we are at no loss to know that he means nothing more than that he left Pharaoh to the hardness of his heart, and to pursue the bent of his own evil inclination. When we are told that God 'moved' David to sin in the case of numbering his people, and, at the same time, are told that 'Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked him to number Israel,' we are manifestly to understand that God only permitted Satan to tempt David to sin and left him in his own weakness to yield to the temptation. And when we are told that God hardened the heart and blinded the eyes of the Jews, and, elsewhere, are informed that it is 'the god of this world that blinds the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them,' it is very easy for us to see that the sacred writers mean no more than that he permitted the 'god of this world' to exert his influence to blind their minds and harden their hearts, and that, being left to themselves, they were, consequently, blinded and hardened. We maintain, therefore, that God does not cause or excite men to do sinful actions.

Having thus endeavored to show you that he does not cause unlawful actions to be done, I shall now endeavor to shew what, in his providence, he does do, in regard to the sins of men.

1. Here, I first remark, that he gives men the *physical power* by which they perform sinful actions. Were it not for his upholding power, they could not exercise any of their mental faculties, nor could they move any member of their bodies. This is manifest from the fact of their being dependent upon him for 'life and health, and all things.' But his granting of this power to them does not make him the author or the abettor of their crimes. Were you to give a man money to buy food for his family, and

were he to lay it out for liquor, and make himself drunk, you would regard it as very unjust in any one to say that you were either the author, or the abettor, of his intemperance. Well, if God has given power to men for good and holy ends, and they abuse it, there is no justice in saying that he is the author of that abuse.

2. Secondly, I remark that God permits men to do sinful actions. By his permission of them, I do not mean a *helpless sufferance*. He is omniscient, and therefore, cannot be taken by surprise. He is omnipotent, and, therefore, cannot be overpowered. He well foresees all that men *will* do, and all that they *would* do. And he is as perfectly able to prevent them from committing the sins which they *do* commit, as he is to prevent those that they *would* commit, and that he *does* prevent. Who will have the hardihood to say that the Almighty is not able to prevent men from sinning?

However, to confirm my position by scripture proof, I will quote a few passages that speak of God's permission of men's evil deeds. In the 81st Psalm God himself says, 'My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me. So *I gave them up to their own heart's lusts*, and they walked in their own counsels.' In the 14th chapter of the Acts of the apostles, Paul says to the men of Athens, 'In times past he *suffered* all nations to walk in their own ways.' And, in the 1st chapter of Romans, the same apostle says that God '*gave up*' the Gentiles 'to uncleanness,' and 'to vile affections.' These quotations are amply sufficient to prove that God does permit men to sin when he thinks proper to permit them. I will now show you, from the same high authority, that he *can*, and *does*, *prevent* them, when he thinks proper. Here I would first refer you to the words of Jacob to his wives, respecting Laban's evil intentions towards him. He says to them, 'Your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but God *suffered him not* to hurt me.' Listen, in the next place, to the words of David respecting God's providential care over the patriarchs: 'He *suffered* no man to do them wrong.' And, again, hear the words of Paul to the Corinthians: 'God is faithful who will not *suffer* you to be tempted above that ye are able.' Hence we see that he can, and does, prevent men from sinning whenever he pleases not to permit them. As it is said in the text before us, so it is. 'Whatsoever the Lord *pleased* that did he in heaven, and in earth, and in the seas, and all deep places.'

3. In the third place, I remark that God limits the sinful actions of men. As he says to the waves of the sea, so he says to the wickedness of men, 'hitherto shalt thou come and no farther.' 'The remainder of man's wrath shalt thou restrain,' says the psalmist. Were it not so, 'men would transform this world into the very image of hell.' Nay, more; ere long, they would totally

depopulate the earth. Urged on by avarice, and lust, and animosity, and cruelty, and revenge, they would exterminate the whole race of mankind by the fiendish work of mutual destruction.

4. In the fourth place, by his providence, God overrules the sinful actions of men in such a manner as to make them promote his own holy ends. In wickedly selling Joseph to the Ishmaelites, his brethren designed no good, either to him or to any other human being. But God overruled their sin, so as to make it produce much good to Joseph, to the Egyptians, to the Canaanites, and even to themselves. In falsely accusing him, and having him thrown into prison, Potipher's wife intended evil, and only evil against him; but God made her sin subservient to his elevation to the highest place of power under Pharaoh. And were we perfectly acquainted with the history of all good men, we would find that sins committed by themselves, and by others against them, are very often made to conduce to their eternal welfare. As the skilful physician takes poison and converts it into medicine to cure diseases, so God takes sin, and, in defiance of its contrary nature and tendency, compels it to subserve his wise and holy purposes. But, notwithstanding this is true, yet you must beware of supposing that men may do evil that good may come. The native tendency, and the only tendency of sin, is to produce misery and death, and everlasting destruction; and under the management of such ignorant and impotent beings as men are, such would be its invariable consequences. To make it yield any better fruits, it must be under the government of infinite wisdom and almighty power.

Thus it is that, to use the words of our Confession of Faith, the providence of God 'extends itself to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men, and that not by a *bare* permission, but *such a permission* as has, joined with it, a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering, and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to his own holy ends; yet so as the sinfulness thereof proceeds only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is, nor can be the author or approver of sin.' He permits men to be tempted to sin, and then permits them to yield to the temptation; he sets limits to the abounding of their iniquity; and he compels it to render an unwilling and reluctant service to his own glory, and to the good of some part of his moral empire. If such government and control over the sinful actions of men makes him the author of those actions, then he is the author of sin. But no man of common sense will say that such providential agency, in regard to such actions, does make him a partaker in their moral turpitude.

Consequently, all those who charge the bible and our ecclesiastical standards, with making God the author of sin, do thereby blaspheme the word of God, and calumniate us, and all our beloved brethren whose standards of doctrine are the same as ours.

I defy any man to point out a single proposition, in those formularies, that appears any more like making God the author of sin, than those which I have now laid before you, and proved from the oracles of God.

Seeing, then, that our doctrine on God's providence in regard to sinful actions, does not make him the author of sin, and seeing that we declare that providence to be the execution of his decrees in regard to them, it is manifestly absurd and wicked to represent what we say of those decrees as making him the author of sin. It certainly cannot be wrong to say that God eternally *decreed to do* all that he actually does do. And, certainly, to say that God never determined beforehand what he would do, or what he would leave undone, is palpably absurd, and openly at war with the plainest declarations of divine revelation.

Might we not, then, reasonably indulge the hope that those who admit our doctrine on divine providence, would cease to carp at our doctrine on the divine decrees? Were it not for the careless and criminal misconceptions of some, and the knowing and malicious misrepresentations of others, we might indulge this pleasing hope. May the God of providence hasten the time, when professors of different denominations will be brought to candidly examine each other's opinions, to speak of them candidly before the public, and to see alike on all the important subjects that are brought before us in his word!

In conclusion, permit me to remark, that the doctrine which I have now presented to view, teaches us to be *humble* in prosperity and *patient* in adversity. In prosperity we are prone to forget that our success is owing to the good providence of God, and to ascribe it entirely to our own skill and industry, and energy and perseverance, and other virtues; and, in consequence, to be puffed up with pride. But let us remember that 'every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the father of lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning;' and let the remembrance of this keep us humble. And again, in adversity, we are prone to be fretful and discontented, because *we* cannot see how the evils that befal us tend to promote our welfare. With good old Jacob, we are apt to say 'all these things are against us.' But let us remember that no evil can befal us without either the *causation* or the *permission* of the infinitely wise Creator and Ruler of all worlds; and that 'all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to his purposes;' and let the remembrance of these things banish from our minds every impatient feeling.